

FRONTEX EVALUATION REPORT 2013

EPN HORIZONTAL PROGRAMME

JO EPN Hermes 2013

Operations Division
Joint Operations Unit
Sea Borders Sector

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When totalled in numbers, sub-Saharan migrants had the biggest impact on irregular migration to the operational area. In total, 20 778 irregular *Horn of African* migrants were apprehended along with 15 817 *West or Central-African* migrants. The above numbers clearly indicate the existence of well-established, well-organised facilitation networks both between the countries of origin and Libya, and also at the last departure areas on the northern coast of Libya. During the JO Hermes 2013 several new routes and new *modi operandi* related to sub-Saharan migrants were discovered.

After the massive flows in the summer and autumn of 2013, the trend (very unseasonably) remained high in winter, too. This was most probably connected to the presence of maritime assets operating under the umbrella of the Italian operation “Mare Nostrum”. These assets were deployed with the main aim of saving lives at sea, and these assets intercepted and ferried all the migrants from the high seas (close to the Libyan shores) to Sicily. However, facilitation networks active in Libya have exploited the presence of the Mare Nostrum assets close to the Libyan coast, and filled unseaworthy boats with migrants departing also in winter months, counting on the early search-and-rescue activities of the operation. The operation “Mare Nostrum” was launched in mid-October 2013 after two fatal cases occurred near the island of Lampedusa whereby the lives of 385 migrants were lost at sea. In the first four months of 2014, with the improvement of the weather conditions, the number of arrivals increased exponentially: 2 120, 3 360, 5 190 and 17 891 in January, February, March and April, respectively.

The JO Hermes 2013 contributed heavily to acquiring operational intelligence related to irregular migration from Africa and the Middle East. Over 500 interviews and landing reports were produced during the operation and the systematic updating of information allowed for a reliable mapping of the situation for the purposes of risk analysis. Apart from the “traditional” places of deployment of debriefing experts which were in the neighbourhood of the CARA/CIE centres, Italy has now established similar places in Lampedusa and in the landing areas (Pozzallo, Augusta, Ragusa) where “Mare Nostrum” assets ferry newly arriving migrants.

1.2. Operational aim

The operational aim of JO EPN Hermes 2013 was to implement coordinated operational activities to control irregular migration flows and other cross border crime from Tunisia, Algeria, Libya and Egypt towards the Pelagic Islands, Sicily and Sardinia.

1.3. Period of implementation and operational areas

In accordance with the provision of the Operational Plan, the joint activities started on 06 May 2013 (00:00h LT) and ended on 30 April 2014 (24:00h LT).

The operational area M1 was established from the south coasts of Sicily Island up to 24 NM of the Tunisian coast. Additional operational area south of Sardinia M2 was on standby and would only be activated if the area was targeted with qualified migratory incidents to be evaluated with the host MS (Member State).

A Common Patrolling Area (CPA) was established in the east part of Sicily from the 08 August 2013 in order to tackle the new phenomenon of the “mother” boats from Egypt. This new operational area was common to JO EPN Hermes and Aeneas and assets from both operations were patrolling the area according to the decision taken during the Joint Coordination Board (JCB) Meeting in the International Coordination Centre (ICC).

From the 02 December 2013, the operational area M1 was extended southwards up to the south/southwest limit of the Maltese SAR.

1.4. Participants

Host and Home MS¹

The Host MS was Italy while the Home MS were Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom. In total, 20 different authorities (3 from the Host MS and 17 from Home MS) took part to the activities.

In total, 73 technical equipments (61 from the Host MS and 12 from the Home MS) and 141 experts (84 from the Host MS and 57 from the Home MS) were deployed during the JO.

Other participating entities

The concept of “multiagency cooperation” was implemented within the JO EPN Hermes, enabling multifunctional approach aiming to improve the border surveillance at the external maritime borders, including the counter of cross border criminality, also contributing to optimize cost-effectiveness of the activities of relevant competent authorities.

Since the beginning of the JO EPN Hermes, Frontex established cooperation through the Italian points of contact with EUROPOL (European Police), EMSA (European Maritime Security Agency), EFCA (European Fishery Control Agency) and EASO (European Asylum Support Office).

Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova participation was encoded into the operational plan as well. During periods of one week, one observer from each participating Third Countries (TC) was deployed in the ICC and participated at the JCB meetings.

1.5. Financial information

The budget initially committed for MSs deployments was 3.000.000,00€. Due to the irregular migration pressure, the JO EPN Hermes 2013 was extended and the total final budget committed was 9.020.745,80€.

The level of payments, on 29 May 2014, was equal to 6.630.090,00€ (73,50% of the committed budget). The amount of 2.390.655,80€ (26,50%) is still to be paid.

2. Achievement of objectives

Enhance border security - Effective border control at external borders maintaining preventive effects, enhanced detection and prevention of cross border crime.

Partly Achieved: JO EPN Hermes 2013 has provided an effective border control at external border of the EU. It has also enhanced the detection and prevention of the cross border crime. The JO increased capabilities for early detections, prevention and for identification of facilitators. Nevertheless, with the implementation of “Mare Nostrum” and the consequence of having patrolling activities close to TC, the numbers of migrants arriving has increased dramatically thus the preventive effect is inexistent.

Enhance efficiency of border security - Detection of all targets enabling to intercept persons, to prevent unauthorized border crossings, to counter cross-border criminality and to take measures against persons who have crossed the border illegally as well as to report the other illegal activities observed.

¹ For the purposes of the present document, the term “Member State” includes also the States participating in the relevant development of the Schengen acquis in the meaning of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and its Protocol (No 19) on the Schengen acquis integrated into the framework of the European Union

Partly Achieved: The selection and use of the MS technical equipments deployed in the JO has been done according to the intelligence collected. The number of arrivals in European Union undetected was very small. Aerial assets delivered early detections that allowed an effective intervention by the maritime units. Nevertheless, and since the implementation of “Mare Nostrum”, the effectiveness of Frontex maritime patrolling activities has become more limited. The Italian Navy units are patrolling in Libyan SAR (Search and Rescue) area (external perimeter) and Frontex deployed naval units are limited the operational area which southern limit is the Maltese SAR.

Enhance operational cooperation - High level of MS participation in JO; Enhanced inter-agency cooperation and cooperation between national authorities of host MS as well as on EU level; Seeking involvement of TC in operational activities; Multi-character operational concept applied.

Achieved: The level of Home MS in JO EPN Hermes 2013 was higher when compared to last year operation. The increase number of arrivals in the operational area had proper response with support from Home MS. The level of cooperation among National Authorities of the Host MS has increased - the deployment of an Italian Navy Liaison Officer (LO) in the ICC has allowed a better synergy between EPN Hermes and “Mare Nostrum”. The level of the cooperation with other EU agencies has reached a very good level with systematic and smooth exchange of information even though there is room for improvements. The participation of TC of interest (departure countries) is essential but has been impossible due to the instable social and political situation.

Enhance exchange of information - Collection of operational information from all actors involved in order to obtain intelligence, thus improving the risk assessments that underpin the operational activities.

Achieved: The information/intelligence collected and received from different sources has been shared among all the actors involved, thus allowing a better decision making in order to tackle the irregular migration phenomena. Other valid information was also collected from interviews. The sea state and weather conditions always were taken into account by ICC in the planning of the patrolling activities.

Enhance efficiency of the exchange of information - Implementation of fully automated online reporting system; Seeking standardized format and quality of the reports and interviews.

Achieved: The information has been shared on the basis of the automated online system - JORA aimed to standardize with other JO allowing comparison between same indicators. Format and quality standardization have been implemented even though there is a need to constantly follow the correct implementation.

Identify possible risks and threats - Updated knowledge about the irregular migration related criminal activities and networks operating in the area and higher identification of the risks and threats related.

Achieved: JO EPN Hermes 2013 has obtained a better knowledge about the phenomena of the migration related to criminal activities and networks operating in the area. With Frontex contribution, among others, the modus operandi of the “mother” boats from Egypt and the wooden boats with crew hired from Tunisia by Libyan networks was detected allowing Host MS a better planning and organization of their patrolling to tackle illegal activities.

Establish and exchange best practices - Fostering practical cooperation between the authorities involved in prevention and tackling irregular migration as well as cross-border crime; Delivering workshops, briefings, operational meetings to participants.

Partly achieved: JO EPN Hermes 2013 has fostered practical cooperation among all the Host MS Authorities involved as well as Home MS Authorities with the same goal, tackle the irregular migration and the cross border crime by delivering briefings, operational meetings, workshop, and ad hoc videoconferences with the neighboured operations. Still no nomination by Italy of Local Trainers to deliver the operational briefings on spot to the crews. Operational briefing at central level to the deployed experts worked perfectly and was highly appreciated by the participants. Intelligence workshops delivered by the debriefing advisor provided to debriefing experts the situational awareness and knowledge of their tasks in the intelligence collection.

Support establishment of permanent structures - Continue fostering cooperation/information exchange between MS NCC (National Coordination Centre)/ICC/LCC (Local Coordination Centre).

Partly achieved: ICC in Pratica di Mare is a well developed structure with very professional officers deployed. Nevertheless, some difficulties were identified when there was a need to address to other national law enforcement authorities. Cooperation between all levels, LCC's/ICC/NCC was smooth and effective.

Support provision of trainings - Implementation of targeted specific training activities.

Achieved: In order to improve the performances of the participating assets, EFCA delivered to the ICC, via video-conference, a specific training on fisheries control that would be later on forward to each of the crews participating in the JO by the Italian Guardia Costiera/Liaison Officer, as defined in the Operational Plan. JORA Training was delivered on spot to LCC, ICC and NCC by a Frontex SGO.

3. Link to other Frontex activities and best practices

Joint Operations Reporting Application (JORA) - Reporting of incidents in the JO was completed via JORA.

Frontex One Stop Shop (FOSS) - All main operational information about the JO (contact details of the JO EPN Hermes 2013 team members, operational plan and annexes, templates, documents from various meetings, situational reports, etc) was available in FOSS.

Operational Resources Management System (OPERA) - OPERA was used to manage the operational resources pooled and deployed in the JO, composing the border guards' teams, issuing accreditation cards and granting access to FOSS.

European Patrol Network (EPN) - JO EPN Hermes 2013 and JO EPN Aeneas 2013, both under the umbrella of the EPN Programme, have been focusing on irregular migration in the Central Mediterranean. Both JO have been coordinated from the ICC Pratica di Mare.

EPN Staff Exchange - The EPN Staff Exchange was used in order to reinforce the cooperation among the ICC's, LCC's and MRCC's (Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre), involved in coordinating JOs at sea borders, in a flexible cooperative framework. The objective was to enable these Coordination Centres with increasing situational awareness, response and interoperability by exchanging their experts in order to share their experiences, knowledge and best practices.